DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 156 547 SO 010 540

AUTHOR Ferguson, Patrick
TITLE State Social Studies Councils and the Diffusion of New Social Studies Materials: Alabama as a Case Study.
PUB DATE Nov 77
NOTE 10p.; For related documents, see SO 010 539, SO 010 542-543; Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies (Cincinnati, Ohio, November 23-26, 1977); Not available in hard copy from EDRS due to poor reproducibility of original document

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Adoption (Ideas); Agency Role; *Case Studies; Change Strategies; Cooperative Planning; Curriculum Development; *Diffusion; Elementary Secondary Education; Evaluation; Instructional Improvement; *Instructional Materials; Reading Level; Selection; *Social Studies; State Agencies; State Departments of Education; *State Programs; Success Factors; Teacher Role
IDENTIFIERS *Alabama

ABSTRACT

Examination of the experience of the Alabama Social Studies Council in diffusing instructional material can provide insight into the proper diffusion role of state councils and into the effectiveness of diffusion efforts. Factors which affect diffusion efforts include the nature and composition of the social studies council, the mandated course of study, related textbook laws, the function of the state department of education, composition of the student population, and the qualifications and attitudes of teachers and supervisors. The Alabama Council is a relatively small organization (about 100 members) with a modest financial base. Membership consists primarily of secondary and higher education social studies educators. Alabama students represent a heterogeneous population, with state wide reading norms below the national average. Many teachers throughout Alabama are deficient in their social studies and general educational preparation. The Alabama Social Studies Council has centered diffusion efforts on the annual social studies conference, and has also attempted to make educators aware of new materials through the council newsletter, teacher workshops, local efforts of council members, and contacts with state department of education officials. Based on the Alabama case study, the conclusion is that state social studies councils should serve a communicative rather than an exhortative function with regard to the adoption of new materials. (Author/DB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED156547

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Patrick Ferguson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC) AND USERS OF THE ERIC SYSTEM."

State Social Studies Councils and the Diffusion of New Social Studies Materials: Alabama as a Case Study.

by

Patrick Ferguson
The University of Alabama

Paper presented at Annual Meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies (Cincinnati, Ohio, November 23-26, 1977)

SO 010 540

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

State Social Studies Councils and the Diffusion of New Social Studies Materials: Alabama as a Case Study

Patrick Ferguson
The University of Alabama

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the role of state social studies councils in the diffusion of new social studies materials. Because it is difficult to generalize about state councils, and because the author has had direct experience with only one council, this paper will focus on the Alabama experience. Hopefully, such a case study approach will generate some reflections on the part of the audience through the comparison of these experiences with those of their own councils and lead to clarification of: (1) the proper role that state councils ought to play in diffusing materials, and (2) the extent to which state councils may be effective in these efforts.

This paper will first, describe the variables that influence a state council's diffusion efforts, second, describe Alabama in light of these factors, and third, present the author's conclusions and recommendations.

Factors Affecting Diffusion Efforts

These variables have to do with the nature and composition of the social studies council, and the educational structure and climate within which that council operates. With respect to the state council, these factors affect its capacity to act as an effective diffusion agent; size of the council, nature and extent of its resources, composition of its membership, perceptions and commitments of the council leadership, communication network, traditional

SP010540

goals of the council, and the social and political climate within which the council functions.

With reference to the structure and climate of the state educational environment we must consider: the nature of the state's course of study, related textbook laws, the function of the state's department of education, the composition of the student population, and the qualifications and attitudes of teachers and supervisors.

The Alabama Council

The Alabama Council is a relatively small organization of about 100 members with a modest resource base in terms of funds. It relies heavily upon the charity of its leaders and whatever bootlegging and piggybacking efforts these leaders can make in utilizing the resources of their respective institutions in the form of printing and mailing newsletters, supporting workshops, and so on. The membership consists primarily of secondary social studies teachers and higher education social studies educators with a secondary background. The leadership is balanced between these two groups and is also balanced in terms of ethnic composition. The organization's goals, as set by this leadership are based on a mixture of traditional and change-oriented objectives. Most of the council's efforts are directed toward supporting an annual state social studies fair and sponsoring an annual one-day conference.

The communication link between the leadership and the membership is in the form of a newsletter issued twice a year--supplemented with occasional bulletins.

The council functions in a heterogeneous social and political climate which becomes gradually more mixed as time goes on.

However, the traditional views still predominate. The council has not experienced any noticeable difficulty in terms of social and political factions, but then it has not really taken a controversial or publicized stand on social issues or academic freedom.

The educational system in Alabama is based upon a more centralized state-directed system than is found in many states. There is a state-mandated social studies syllabus which all schools are required to follow. The classroom materials are selected from a list recommended by the State Textbook Committee and approved by the State Board of Education. The State Department of Education implements the textbook law and sometimes publishes social studies materials for state-wide use.

The students in the Alabama schools represent a heterogeneous population. There are school systems where students are reading above grade level on the average, as in Mountain Brook and Huntsville. Unfortunately, state-wide norms are below the national average with some counties having average eleventh grade reading scores below the seventh grade level. National Assessment scores in 1974 showed students in the southeast to be 2.3% below social studies performance average for the nation. The average scores for blacks were 9.8% below those for whites.

Teachers' characteristics are most difficult to assess. Most institutions in the state are accredited, but many teachers, teaching under old earlier requirements, are deficient in their preparation. It is also difficult to generalize about social and political characteristics, but there is a higher degree of acceptance of authority and traditionalism than might be the case nationally, although this is also changing.

Diffusion Efforts in Alabama

The leadership of the Alabama Council has recognized the value of the new social studies materials and has taken the position that social studies instruction around the state would be greatly improved if the objectives, strategies and materials of the "new social studies" projects were introduced into the classrooms. However, the council has not explicitly identified this as a specific objective of its efforts. Rather, the efforts that have been made in the interest of diffusion have been the incidental component of a larger commitment to "improving instruction." There are also a number of mitigating factors that serve to restrict the widespread adoption of such materials. The leadership is aware of these restricting variables and the feeling is that more may be accomplished by the action of members in local systems than through any state-wide diffusion efforts.

Recognizing that the council has limited membership and resources, the most consistent and direct effort at state-wide diffusion has been through the annual state-wide conference. The Council has sponsored consultants and speakers from many of the most publicized projects, including the Carnegie-Mellon, Harvard, American Bar Association, and Analysis of Public Issues Projects. Speakers have included Ted Fenton, Fred Newmann, James Shaver and Cherif Bassaouni, among others. These conferences usually attract about 150 educators and the response to the programs has been very favorable.

Despite this positive response it cannot be said that this approach has been effective if one considers the extent to which

these materials have been introduced into the classroom. Weidner surveyed the state in 1972, sampling one-third of the secondary schools in the state and found only one school using any of the new materials. This was after several state conferences had been offered on new materials, including those in American History. This serves to confirm the opinion of many of us that conferences have not been a very effective means of diffusion. In recent years the approach has been to offer an annual program that represents more of a potpourri approach with classroom teachers presenting specific methods that have worked in their classrooms. These presentations seldom refer to new project materials.

The newsletter, issued twice a year, does not devote much space to new materials and cannot be considered to be an significant instrument for diffusion.

Other approaches have included charging the Curriculum Committee with making recommendations about the introduction of new materials and appraising members of workshops such as the NSF Leadership implementation institutes. The reports of the Curriculum Committee have been distributed to the membership but their effect has probably been inconsequential. Only a relatively few teachers have participated in new materials workshops.

Whatever influences have been exacted upon the curriculum have been through the local efforts of teachers and supervisors who also happen to be members of the State Council. This is a function of the fact that those who are motivated to keep abreast of innovations at the national level also become the members and leaders in the State Council. Their efforts would be forthcoming whether or not they were members of the State Council.

About five years ago the council leadership appraised its efforts to introduce change into the social studies programs around the state and realized that its conference, committee and newsletter efforts were having only a minimal effect. The Executive Committee, responding to recommendations of the Curriculum Committee, decided that since the control of the syllabus and materials was centralized through the State Board of Education, effort would have to be directed toward attempting to influence the state social studies syllabus and the subsequent deliberations of the State Textbook Committee. According to Alabama law, the state syllabus was due to be revised and the Curriculum Committee began contacting State Department officials through mail and direct personal contacts in an effort to place many Council members on the task force which was charged with revising the syllabus. Of the ten-member committee chosen, only one was not a State Council member. All three of the State Department consultants were members as well. One of the main objects of the Council members' efforts was to establish a curriculum that would lend itself to the adoption of new commercially available materials, or at least not preclude their adoption. Despite a number of compromises, the committee was successful in establishing a syllabus guide which was skills based in its objectives and flexible enough to allow for the adoption of the newer materials.

The Committee subsequently met with the State Textbook Committee and an effort was made to explain the necessity of looking beyond the traditional textbook in terms of the criteria and objectives

reflected in some of the newer project materials. The final approved list offers options at each grade level many of of which included, for example, the Fenton, SRSS and APB materials. Subsequent adoptions by school systems over the last year,while still reflecting the philosophy of reliance upon the traditional textbook to a large extent, also show that many systems have elected new materials in place of the traditional textbook. Whether they will be effectively used is another question and there have been some misgivings stated by teachers about the lack of comprehensive content, high degree of readability and their preparation to deal with these materials.

This leads to the problem of diffusing materials in a state where: so many students are deficient in reading skills; there is a prevailing air of conservatism; the State textbook law precludes the adoption of perhaps the majority of the materials because they do not meet readability, durability, cost and textbook format requirements; and local systems by and large do not have funds to purchase supplementary materials. The State Council,in recognizing these problems and considering its rather meager resources, has not pursued,with any express or direct vigor, the goal of diffusing information about the new materials beyond the means described in this paper.

Conclusions

This raises the question of what the role of a state council ought to be with regard to spreading the word and perhaps even advocating the adoption of the new materials. It would seem that the council ought to serve a communication rather than exhortative function in this respect. It would also seem to be unrealistic for a council to expend inordinant amounts of its resources and

efforts for the purpose of communicating to teachers the express rationale,objectives,methods and materials that are contained in particular projects. It should serve as a communication link in terms of connecting teachers with sources which can provide this information through workshops, meetings, descriptive brochures, ERIC/CHESS and the like. The function of the Alabama Council will probably continue to be in terms of attempting to insure that the syllabus is sufficiently flexible to allow the adoption of such materials and to insure that those in charge of adopting materials are cognizant of the nature and value of these materials. Secondly, it must continue to keep its membership apprised of the availability of opportunities and sources whereby they may keep abreast of new materials as they become available. Any more explicit or direct role in the diffusion process,or in terms of the advocacy of new materials,cannot be expected in the near future.